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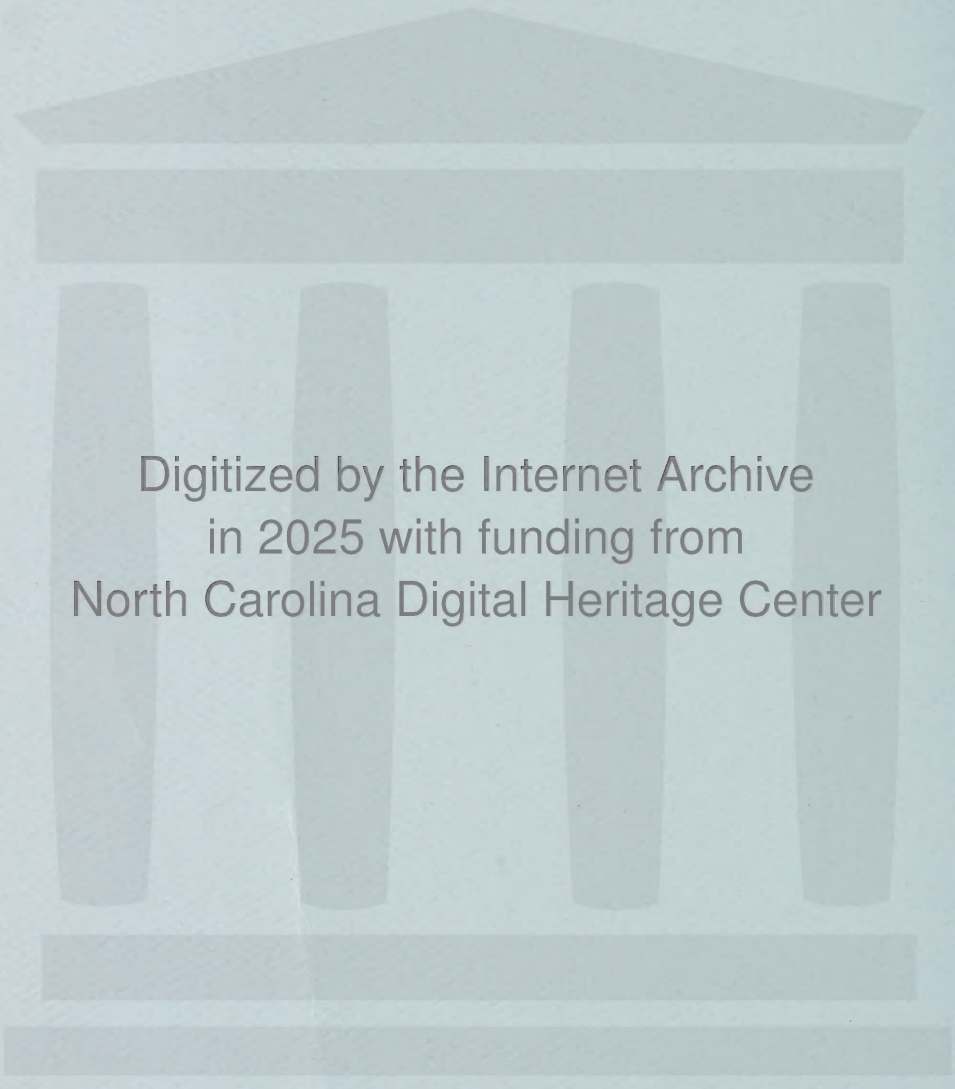
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For all its upland bristling,
That shallow madcap river
Now flows through meadows meekly
And cuts the shore no longer.

However much you hasten,
No longer do you savour
That two edged radiation
Of rebounding rapture.

Investigate, seek out, unbend
The ways, now slackened in their pace,
Loop out and stray, by craft delay,
Entwine yourself in twisted roots
And yearn beneath the willow tree.
But turn your winding as you may
You still cannot avoid the sea.

NIKOLAI MORSHEN
Translated by E. T. WEIANT

42nd Street Oyster Bar

We're shuckers.
That's how we make a livin'.
Shuckin' oysters.
That's why the extra 50¢.
Jab a blade in her guts
And pry her shells apart.
We're shuckers.
That's how we make a livin'.
Shuckin' the horny jaws off oysters
So's you can eat'em,
Lyin' there on a pearly shell
All shiny round an' slick.
Can slide right down your throat
If you know how.
She's a muscle they say
There's her pseudy pod.
That's why we gotta shuck'em,
An catch'em too.
Rake'em outta their beds.
You wouldn't know'em
Mud-scaley an' piled together.
We're shuckers.
That's why the 50¢—
That's how we make a livin'.

URSULA ALEXANDER

Cheyne Walk

On the river, the brownstone
sills and doorsteps hug their foundations;
crouching, hunted deformations
under the night. As rain on the edge, closing,
suspended like a steel cord, the earth before
my walking falls into horizons one
after one. Wind that rattles in cacophonous exhalations
precedes all evidence
of time. Candles flicker in windows outside
of me, within other walls. There is no measure of my pace;

or knowing why all that is behind me descends everywhere
before me; or why there is no unfolding;
why this creased and ancient pavement carries me
howling, serpentine, barbed and breathless
throughout its angry journey;
why I have become the dark watcher in this so still an absence.

(To be all this, and alone,
is to meet my youth face to face . . .
cowering against a lamp post; holding
onto a shadow with whitened knuckles,
wide-eyes turned inside out,
and a throat that now chokes up in startled pain
the quiet of all innocence . . .)

ELIZABETH EARLE

¿Quien Soy?

Martín Fierro,
el buen caballero,
existe hoy día
en un alma que es mía.

Martín cantó
palabras como yo;
los que son tristes
los que embisten

las sociedades
y blancas charadas
que tratan de matar
y engañarme.

El derecho de ser
no puedo (haber) tener
por ser sombreado
mi cutis helado.

Tienes la culpa,
y yo, la disculpa
de ser renegado
y puesto tan bajado.

El Gran Trovador
reparte mi dolor;
El fue el perro,
yo soy el Negro.

RHETA LANEHART

Ann
Porter

Joy Clower

Diamonds In The Dust

for I see diamonds in the dust
put there by light of morning
dawning though it has no purpose
for this day I have seen before
and I shall see again

the mist among the trees is torn
its pale translucency destroyed
the day transfixed in greying silence
and hesitant morning light

we speak, but what, I ask, are words
but vain and empty sounds that have no purpose
save to fill the empty air with emptiness
and to delude the day

ours the struggle to reach the other
and to touch
and all our words become as nothing
forever lost among the trees and wind

FRANCIS PATERSON

Yo

El susurro de la brisa entre las palmas,
El silencio profundo de la nieve en las almas,
El estruendo aterrante de la revolución,
Las horas de calma del estudio en evolución,
Todas se complementan
Y después se forjan
Para formar el "yo."

MARJORIE T. KIRBY

Innocence

Your silence spoke
With eloquence
To my belief,
Putting heartbeat
Whispers
Into bold relief,
Intensifying senses
Until blurred,
How could I know
Whose love it was
I heard?

TILDA TODD

"Roses In December"

Today, I think that memories allow
The bloom of unseen roses in December.
And I'd give anything to ask you now
What I never knew before, or don't remember.

Eighty years ago your father's pride
Was born in a prairie house of sod. You soon
Moved into town where clompy, wooden side-
Walks echoed, but did you watch blue skies in June?

We played at dominoes on winter nights,
When you were old and I was young. But I
Forgot to ask: did you ever get into fights,
And would you tease your brother if he'd cry?

I found a picture of your gentle face
At twenty. Oh, what *did* your papa tell you,
When he bought you a long, white dress of handmade lace
And muslin, to make your eyes so extra blue?

I copy recipes, with edges torn,
Of complicated things you made, like real
Mincemeat, and custard. Did you husk the corn?
Churn butter? Use wax to make red jelly seal?

You always said "Good Night," and made me still,
But how you said "Good-bye" one night, was new.
Roses, pressed last May and kept until
This winter, dim like memories of you.

JANE HOYME

Bill

Bill was his first name. No one seemed to think it particularly necessary to find out his last name. It was probably Scotch or English, straightforward and easy to pronounce, but for three years now he had been introduced to new employees and regular customers as Bill, and no one ever questioned the finality of that lone, strong syllable. It didn't matter that there were two other cooks in the restaurant named Bill. If a waitress shouted, "Bill, a BLT on toast!" it would only be made by the tall limpid man who always seemed to have a bit of sleep in the corners of his eyes.

Bill worked the early shift. He would arrive at the restaurant alone and stand at the back door smoking. At this hour, he was paler than usual, and his dull grey eyes rested in crescents on his bony cheeks. From time to time he'd lift his chapped hands to push back his hair; it was straight and looked as if its color had been slowly strained away by constant combing. He would suck on his cigarette and use every muscle in his bloodless cheeks and lips to draw the smoke into his lungs.

Afterwards, Bill would find the morning waitress and say, "Hi, doll. Tired this morning?" If she answered "Yes," he'd push his thin yellow lips to the side and leer, "Aha! Too much night life." If she answered "No," he'd wind his arm around her waist and coo, "Why not? Seems like a doll like you could find someone to entertain you!" He'd share coffee and another cigarette with the waitress. If he felt particularly gay, he might chase her around the back rooms, his permanently unbuttoned shirt exposing his hairy white chest that was blotched with yellow scars. But, if it was just an ordinary day, he'd sit on a plastic chair, stroke the straw-colored hair on his chest and sing variations of "Early to bed, early to rise, will make you healthy, but it won't make you wise." It was his morning ritual, and the waitresses knew if they laughed, and maybe even put their arm around his shoulder, it would be a good day.

Hamburgers were his specialty. He slapped the patties on the grill the same way he slapped down a winning hand of cards in the back room. Then he'd push his cracked yellow nails, often dirty, through his hair, run to the back room for a cigarette, and return

to the grill in time to turn the patties. His hamburgers were always raw on the inside, and he'd shove them over to the waitress saying, "Here doll—they're raw, but just tell 'em they're Bill's babies!" Then he'd pull the skin around his eyes into a bawdy wink and open his lips into a gummy smile.

Rumors circulated among the employees that Bill had once been the head cook for the Whalley—the most exclusive restaurant in town. It was true that he could turn out a magnificent salad plate if he cared to; but he seldom did. No, it was hard to imagine this man with shaking hands decked out in a crisp chef's hat, nursing charcoal broiled steaks and faking a foreign accent and a name like "Tonio" when customers complimented his culinary abilities. If he had once been an artist, he had certainly changed.

When Melissa Taylor first met Bill, she was in the back room trying to adjust her size ten uniform to her size seven figure.

"So, *you're* the new hostess." She nodded and crookedly smiled at him. "I'm Bill," he said, as if that were all she needed to know, about him or the restaurant.

"I'm Melissa," she answered. Her hands shook slightly as she fixed her collar.

"In college? Your first job?"

"No, I mean it is my first job; but I'm not in college yet. That comes in September."

Bill bent over until his colorless eyes were on the level of her green eyes. "Have a boy friend?"

"Uh, yes I do, but he lives in Alaska." (She had laughed and invented the first interesting reply she could think of when he asked that question.) Bill certainly was bold—but somehow it didn't matter. This Bill character was an introduction to the kind of people she would work with all summer, and he was not totally distasteful, if he was a little raw looking. At any rate, his offhand manner put her at ease.

Just exactly why Bill became attracted to this new hostess, no one could say. Of course, he'd never been one to ignore people, even the newest bus boy. In fact, he was the arbitrator of all the petty rivalries and shifter of all the gossip that inevitably arose in the restaurant. He knew how to talk to people and get their respect the old hands said. If some waitress was acting bitchy, he'd just look at her and say, "Go to hell, you old bag!" in a teasing, flirtatious voice; and that was that. But why he wasted so much attention on a college kid who smiled too much and didn't have

a shred of common sense was more than the old hands could understand.

"Good Christ," Gerri LeCanet, the veteran waitress, would mutter, "that Melissa kid's a jerk. Piling all those people in my section at the same time! She's just lucky Bill stands up for her. Ya know, old Bill's acting strange . . . You'd *almost* think . . ." And then she'd roll her eyes upward into a suggestive arch and waddle off to wipe her table, leaving the other waitresses giggling.

Of course, the other waitresses realized Gerri might be a little jealous. She and Bill had always been the best of friends. They called each other "lover" with the "o" stretched to unimaginable length, and exchanged off-color jokes. Bill was particularly amused by her bawdy French songs, which he probably didn't understand. But he certainly understood the twinkle in her blue mascaraed eyes when she sang them. Bill and Gerri would guffaw at the end of her concert and then he'd pat the top of her blue-tinted, lacquered hair and say, "At-a-girl, I bet they loved you at *La Café* back in France." She relished his attention, and the other waitresses could understand her feelings: Bill certainly was spending a lot of time with that kid.

But all in all, Bill's attention to Melissa—or Miss Taylor, as the waitresses were obliged to call her, thanks to the ceremonial manager—was not entirely wasted. She finally learned how to give the correct change at the register, and how to get the right menu on the tables in the morning. Things really were looking hopeful when Miss Taylor began seating the customers in the right section three times out of five. But what was best of all, the other waitresses now felt free enough to gossip around her without feeling as if they were corrupting the cradle. After all, they assumed Bill had initiated her. The old hands even began teasing her a bit —she was quiet, but her face was worth watching. Miss Taylor wasn't such a bad kid—even if she was stupid. At least she didn't mess them up on purpose.

Bill and Melissa shared their cigarette breaks in the back room. They were both voracious smokers, and Bill was an even more voracious talker. But he never used his cigarette to emphasize his words, and relied entirely on his heavy Brooklyn accent. He didn't call her "honey" or "gal," but rather "kid," or "Red." He talked about Lord knows what, and she mostly listened. Sometimes, he'd pump questions to her about her boy friends and school, and she'd answer back tersely but appreciatively.

To come to think of it, no one in the restaurant really knew exactly why she was so attentive to him—whenever *they* were friendly to her she'd just smile politely and rather awkwardly. It must have been one of those strange things that happen from time to time in roadside restaurants—or anywhere else, for that matter.

It was 6:00 A. M. and Bill was not yet on the porch stoop with his cigarette. Melissa was setting up the menus, heard the phone ring and answered it. She had apparently learned well from Bill, since she answered in a crisp sing-song voice, "Good morning, Howard Johnson's, Host of the Highways!"

"Hi, kid, what ya' doin'?"

"What?"

"What do ya mean 'what'—'what ya doin?' Simple question, simple answer."

"Bill!"

"Yeah, kid, it's me, Bill. William Aleksander Snodgrass. Bet ya never knew that I was Snodgrass. We're great, us Snodgrasses. I mean the Snotgrasses *they're* great, not me. Maybe you should just call me Mr. Snot." He was drunk.

"Bill, where *are* you?"

"Here at the Snodgrass house. Wanna' know somepin funny? My son, bet ya never knew I had a son—well my son just bummed me out of a hundred bucks. Ya see there was this bookie and I won, and Henry and me went to see the bastard—he was tryin' to hold out on us—we got the ticket, a hundred bucks. And old Henry decides . . . you there?"

"Yes."

"Old Henry decides to make me look dumb, and he gets on a plane to Miami with my money. How's that for a Snodgrass move? Damned Snodgrasses. They can . . ." He started sobbing.

"Bill."

"Yeah, kid, what d'ya want, anyway?"

"Where are you?"

"Here, I'm right here. Gotta get to work. Called to see if you'll come and get me. Ya see, that bastard Henry, he's my son, left the car somewhere. Gotta get to work."

"Wait, Bill. O.K.? Wait and I'll be there."

She found out his address from the manager and told him where she was going. The manager nodded wearily, "Tell him to get the hell over here, the place falls apart in the mornings without him.

I don't care if he's dying!" The address he had given her read 512 East Boulevard; it was located in a surprisingly comfortable section of town—and she had expected a dive! She rang the bell. No one answered, but the door was open, and she walked into a dark littered room. At first all she noticed was a dusty bookcase and a skruffy kitten pacing the scratched wooden floor. Then she saw Bill, sitting in the faded armchair in the corner, smoking.

"Hi, Red."

"Bill, I don't think you should go to work. You'd just better get into bed and rest."

"No, going to *work* and rest. That's the way *I* do it—rest at work, live away from it. Do you know that bastard Henry stole a hundred bucks from me?"

"Yes, you told me."

"Thinks I'm a stupid ass."

"You're not."

"Must be. Oh, I could 'a been great and gone to college like you! You know, I was a good chef once. Quit. Too much trouble t'be great."

"You are a great guy, Bill."

"No, I was stupid. I'm a stupid ass. My kid bums me out of a hundred bucks. Runs around like me."

"You're a kind man, Bill."

"You've got a lot to learn, Red. That's why I like ya."

She pacified him by listening to him. He was almost sober. She learned that he was used to working in a semi-sober state. It was strange she had never noticed. He wanted her to go to the beach tomorrow. He'd give that boy friend in Alaska a little competition, he said. She agreed, and drove him to work.

The next morning, Bill stood on the stoop. He had on a white shirt, an ironed white shirt, and his hair was heavily greased. He was particularly friendly to the morning waitress, and even accompanied "Early to bed, early to rise" with a stiff attempt at a tap dance. But as the morning progressed he anxiously looked around the restaurant and quieted down a little.

"Say, Gerri," he finally asked, "you seen Melissa?"

"Didn't you know? She had to leave for college today!"

Bill said, "Oh . . . yeah," then he rushed into the back room for a cigarette.

MAUREEN HORAK

Modus Vivendi

I think, therefore I wish not to be.
The cypress, not the laurel, is my tree.
My soul, tired from fighting windmills,
Confronts the tin gods of human wills.

MARJORIE T. KIRBY

Anthropomorphic Sighs

New York drips her steel-straight arms on stony pavements
Weeping horn-blown sighs of dazed amazement
Begging time to stop.

Puddles splash against the rat run rows.
Mud-made mansions spit cynical crows
Defeated in reeking rancor.

Shadows loom sadistic slaps of knowledge
Bouncing truth off lampposts' one time foliage
Threatening mundane hardships.

Only two: the Empire and the Lady, know moments of complacence
Watching antlike creatures dart through maze-structured senses
Of tightly drawn lives.

DIANE NEMIR

Madmind

Has you ever had Madmind, a disease that disapoos
when you hustle up your ebbies and make woosies?
Has you ever had Madmind, when you kinda can't do noo
and you sit around and make a mess of loosies?
Has you ever had Madmind and never worry nope
and has you ever made a Vabahachakon?
I'll tell you what's it like but you'll kinda writhe in fright
and you'll palpitate a race (the Marathon).

Madmind is a mamed bane that creeps on unawares,
one that teaches one to mind ones chichi duds.
Its a fretful Frabskinoo that can bother even you
(especially if your Cippies quake at naughty thuds).
This malady has gotcha when you feel your Riskets swell
and you note your Noddles nodding up a storm.
You'll know you're sick, you have it, if you foibles become habit
and if Nollygobs dance the Nitely where you're shorn.
When your cubbers come untucked tonight and you think you're gonna cry
if you canna seem to find no reasons why,
Too late for you you've got it, and God only knows who wrought it,
and its doubtless you shall have it till you die!

And so hence foreverafter when you dream a funny dream
and when you Crubblescrump those early morning crags,
remember nasty Madmind and please smile each time you scream
so that Humpplemot and weltschmertz aren't your tags.
Didactic lessons don't come free; their costs will raise your hair,
listen to the price your gonna pay:
since you have learned of Madmind you're more vunerable (with fear)
and it'll plague you till your lastest wrinkled day.
Oh you just might catch the Muntimugs or *Herpes Simplex* when,
then you feel the Hennirubs across and back again.
But these afflictions as they may, never will you find
a plex, a vex, a horrid hex, that maimed bane Madmind.

SHELLY SMITH

Space

I am wide, wide, wide above my eyes,
And so I break the compass
And expand so I encompass
All the small things, cross or gentle
All the big things, monumental
I lose the sense of difference
In the whole of space
Above my eyes.

JOHANNA RUCKER

Thistles

Death is a dolphin leaping to the mind,
smooth asker of the underworld, and in his smile
are great blue thistles, symbols
of the mind alive in salt and sun.
Flickering like insights up a wall,
flames in a thought, reflections crawl.
My soul would like, whatever else,
like a lizard to climb and sun itself,
cold in the blazing sun
and never feel itself too warm
on sharp-edged leaf or hot-faced stone.

PAUL BAKER NEWMAN

Feminine Endings

Be honest—what's it like to be a boy?
How does it feel to make the sad admission
You've not the help of female intuition
Or right to get your way by playing coy?
Just think of all the schemes you must employ
To satisfy the lusty male ambition
And make your reasoned words reach full fruition!
In such a plight how can you hope for joy?

Old Mona Lisa proved with just a smirk
We girls can whimper, cry, and surely win
By bold incomprehensibility;
While you are cursed by your great wit to work
For earthly gain and someone's girlish grin
In studied spouts of sensibility.

MAUREEN HORAK

Meiosis of The Mind

Shortly prior to prophase,
Multiplications that amaze
The minds of men
Take place.

A love just found
The senses and the soul astounds
With myriad emotion.

Divisions of the centriole
Move to form each spindle pole
And provide chromosomes
An axis.

Then the reason and the rhyme
Of the attraction comes. In time
Love grows
Or dies.

Genes line up back to back,
Then split to make up for the lack
Of haploid sets
In zygotes.

In the dying of the feeling
Realization sends us reeling
Back to our
Separateness.

Then cleavage of the cytoplasm
Digs the necessary chasm,
And two cells are
Where one was.

Resuscitations of love fail.
It brings us back into the pale
Of individual and lone
Reality.

URSULA ALEXANDER

The Apple

You know that apple which revealed
To Isaac Newton
The law of earthly gravitation?
Well, I'm convinced
That in the last account—he ate it.
That apple—child of earth and sun—
Was born,
Grew out of a bud,
And ripened.
And before this, bees flew
And rain fell, a strong wind blew.
Not so much to make the apple fall
And show by straight-lined motion
That gravity, in truth, exists;
But mainly that it would become
Sweet and lovely,
Juicy, cool, and round,
So that man would break it with affection,
Sense its aroma,
And its sweetness
Taste with his keen and human mouth.

V. SOLOUKHIN
Translated by
MAUREEN HORAK

I Left Them

It's because I never knew
I was leaving all I left,
That I want to slow the stream
Of the present into past.

Pale blue
The old room—
Where at night the slatted, white
Car-lights roved along one wall,
Down another, and away.
Then came
A grave sleep.

Morning's early light and green
Shadows stretched from cottonwoods—
Chilled cream
And red straw—
Berries, in the shade we ate.

On a coulee bridge we'd claimed
Near the slanted olive trees
We talked,
Slowly walked,
Never faltering a step.

I left them all unknowingly—
Oh, and now there's more to leave.
If on this journey we could see
Our footings give, and never grieve!

JANE HOYME

Balloon

That little girl is crying!
Her balloon has flown away.
They comfort her, while the balloon flies on and on.

That young lady's crying!
Where is her bridegroom then?
They comfort her, while the balloon flies on and on.

That woman there is crying!
Her husband's run away.
They comfort her, while the balloon flies on and on.

There sits an old hag weeping!
How little has she lived.
For her balloon came back, but it was blue, was blue.

BULAT OKUDZHAVA
Translated by E. T. WEIANT

grady

Lou Bannister

'Coon Huntin'

PAXON McLEAN

It was Saturday night, and five of us were out for 'coon in Big Raft Swamp. My brother John and I had gone by for Cousin Tom and driven out to the farm just about dark. Levi, our tenant farmer, had promised to take us "coonin," and we were ready to go. Buddy, his eighteen-year-old, was in charge of a pack of dogs that seemed to number in the hundreds. They quivered with impatience, yelping as they leaped and poured into the back of the truck, a shaggy wave of black and gray.

"Miss Rufe, yo ride in de cab wid yo brothah. Me'n Tom 'n Buddy'll keep these hyar fool dawgs frum jumpin' out an' killin' theyselfs. Jes haid straight, John, till you cain' go no more. Hang on to dis axe, Tom." We bounced down dirt roads until we were stopped by a fallen tree. John slammed on brakes, cut the lights, and gave me my orders.

"Now *lis*ten, Ruthie. I'm letting you have this pistol, but *don't* take it out of the holster unless you have a clear shot at a 'coon. *Don't* wave it around,—and *keep up* with us. If you get lost tonight, don't expect us to look for you until tomorrow! I don't think we'll see any snakes, but watch out for 'em anyway. Here's your gun —have a good time."

"Anything *else* you don't want me to do?" I slid out of the truck, gingerly holding the pistol at arm's length—and was knocked flat by Blue, Levi's prize bitch. My bullet missed Buddy by inches.

"'Fore Gawd, Miss Rufe, doon' shoot ma boy!" Levi was hopping around with one leg in his chest-high wading boots, trying to get behind me in case I fired again.

"*Dooon' pint dat gun at me chile!* Miss Rufe, *pleeze* watch what yo dooooin'!"

"Dammit, Ruthie! Stop slinging that pistol around or I'll take it away from you!"

"Did you see what *happened?*"

"Yeah. You almost killed Buddy. Now be more careful, or sit in the truck."

I didn't answer. Buddy and Levi had started "firin' the dawgs."

"Eeee–*yow* — wahh–*oooo!* Go Blue! Yahhhh Susie! Git 'um Blackie! Smoke! Smoke!" Their voices echoed through the trees, slowly muffled by the thick undergrowth into silence. The dogs sprang away, yipping sharply, out of our flashlights' glare. I started to follow, but Levi waved me back.

"Not now, Miss Rufe. Dem dawgs'll chase ole 'coon all round 'fore dey cotches 'um an' trees 'um. We'll hyar 'em change they bark, an' then we heads for 'um through de brush."

"But Levi, you mean we just sit here until they catch the 'coon?"

Buddy snorted. "They ain' goin' cotch 'um till we gits thar. They trees 'um, we shakes 'um down, den dey fights 'um."

"*All* the dogs fight one little 'coon?" I asked weakly.

"Chile, ain' but two dawgs I got as'll fights a 'coon—Susie an' Blue. T'others'll chase 'um, but deys ain' fighten 'um."

"Why not?"

"Dey's *scairt!* I seed a full growed 'coon kill a big dawg afore."

"Oh."

"You sure are full of questions, Annie Oakley!" Tom shined his flashlight at me. "By the way, have you noticed what you're sitting in?"

I grabbed another handful of leaves from the small bush I'd been stripping and held them up to the light, "Poison *I*-vy?"

"Yep! You'll be in *great* shape tomorrow. You're worse than a two-year-old, Ruthie. I knew we shouldn't have brought a dumb *girl!*"

"Wanna shake on that, Buster?" I shot back.

"Miss Rufe, Dey's a little run off de road a ways back thar. Yo'd bes' go warsh dem han's 'fore dey starts a burnin'."

"Thank you, Levi. How far back?"

"Don't worry, Ruthie. You'll know when you fall *in* the damn thing!"

"You think you're so durn smart, John—why don't you go chase a 'coon?"

"Chile, I'll fotch you to it. Stick rite 'hind me now, an' be keerful."

John had to have the last word. "Better make her go first, Levi! She may shoot you." I followed Levi's bobbing light for about fifty miles through briars and tight-laced young oaks.

"How much further *is* it?"

"Right hyar, Miss Rufe. Yo' jes warsh yo han's an' I'll lissen out fo' de dawgs."

The water was icy. "They sound like they're getting closer. Are they?"

"Yup! 'Pears lak dey goin' run ole 'coon up by dis hyar run, but dey's on t'other side. *Bud*–dy! Come on boy! Dey's runnin' 'um back hyar! Now I'll jus' sneak right over dis little run on dis lawg, but don' yo' tries it, Miss Rufe, 'cause you might slip an' dip yo boots."

"Dip my boots?"

"Yessum. Dis run 'bout three foot deep, an' yo' boots not waders lak mine.—Kee–*rist!* I done dip ma boots an' I wet clar through!" Buddy and John came crashing back just in time to haul Levi up onto the bank.

"He'p me git ma boots off, Buddy. I cain' *move* I's so full!" John and Buddy each grabbed a boot and raised it high, dangling Levi upside down as filthy freezing water cascaded over his head.

"*Lawd* God I's *drown*ded!" I stuffed my wool scarf into my mouth to keep from laughing. Tom puffed up and collapsed on a log.

"Most exercise I've had since I dropped a car jack on my foot! Been swimmin', Levi?" Levi just grunted. The dogs started baying in deep-throated chorus.

"Hey Pap! 'Coon done treed. Blue run 'im up—tha's her bell."

"Bell?"

"Yessum. She howls when she chases 'um; she bells when she gits 'um uppa tree." Levi struggled up and lurched toward the sound.

"*Git*tum Blue! Smoke! Eeeeh–*yah!*" We followed as well as we could, forcing our way through the thickest undergrowth I'd ever felt. John clicked his rifle on safety and handed it to me.

"Grab my belt, Ruthie, and hang on. If you shoot me in the back I'll *kill* you!" After five minutes of heavy going, we caught up with Levi. He had his flashlight propped up to shine on an enormous oak tree, and was trying to shake the 'coon down.

"Pop 'um one, Buddy!!" A sharp crack from behind startled me, and I dropped John's gun in the mud. Nobody noticed. We crowded around the tree base, craning to see a small hole halfway up the trunk. Buddy handed his rifle to Tom, stuck his flashlight in his belt, and started to shinny up another tree.

"He's up thar, Pap! I done seed 'is eyes! Pop 'um agin!" Wood

splinters showered as Levi blasted the hole with his shotgun. Buddy swayed dangerously, stretching out to get a closer look.

"He's down!" The dogs were growling horribly, clawing and biting at the tree.

"Yo still got dat axe, Tom?"

"I wondered why I was lugging this blasted heavy thing!"

"Why boy—stan' back, Miss Rufe—how'd yo' think we get de 'coon out'n de tree? Whup dem dawgs back, Buddy, 'fore I hits one." The tree was rotten, and he made a foot-square hole in no time.

"Let Blue go!" The dog streaked by and stuck her head into the hole, jerking it out even faster, and yelping frenziedly.

"'Coon's got'er in de nose!" Levi circled the pair, trying to keep the light on them. "*Su*-sie! Git in thar, dawg!" The two dogs snarled thickly as they fought for holds, thrashing back and forth, slinging blood in glistening sprays. Suddenly they stopped, dropped the 'coon, sniffed it, and stalked off stiff-legged. The other dogs stepped in one by one to sniff, then melted into the dark. Levi picked the 'coon up by its tail and swung it in the light.

"Dey knows when ole 'coon be's daid. Dis un's prime pelt an' fat meat, eh Buddy?"

John threw his arm across my shoulders and turned me away.

"Come on, Ruthie. Let's go home."

Words

have a way
(by our trying
to mean what they say)
of lying.

TILDA TODD

STAFF/FALL 1967

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